

*The*  
*Correspondence*  
*of*  
*Major General Stuart,*  
*with*  
*The Court of Directors of the E. I. C.*  
*Since his return to England in May 1784,*  
*to*  
*March 1785.*

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1. *unpublished*

*High School*



*The Court of Directors of the U.S.A.*

*and the members of the same*

*March 1907*

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A  
L E T T E R  
TO THE HONOURABLE  
The Directors of the East-India Company,  
FROM  
Major General JAMES STUART.

[ May 27th, 1784. ]



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GENTLEMEN,

ON my arrival lately in this country, I meant to have taken a more early opportunity, either of paying my respects in person, or of addressing you by letter ; but for some time I was unable to pay any visits in consequence of a swelling of my leg, occasioned by my painful position on board of ship during the voyage from India ; and the accounts received since my arrival here, of the Resolutions you had been pleased to take with regard to me, in the month of February last, affected me with so much surprise and concern, that I judged it best to allow some days to intervene after that first shock, before I committed my thoughts to writing, or gave you the trouble of reading them.

I do not at present mean to take up your time with complaints of any measures that have been taken with regard to me, either in India, or at home ; or with arguments and proofs to shew that my sufferings have been both unexampled and unmerited.

The object of my anxiety at present, is not the loss of situation, nor the loss of any advantages attending it ; but what engages, and ever will continue to engage, my most anxious attention, is, That the real circumstances of my conduct, in every situation or trust which I have had the honour to hold under his Majesty, or the Honourable East India Company, should be known and ascertained, in such a manner as to put an end to all doubt or obscurity : This becomes absolutely requisite, from the duty which I owe to myself, as well as that which I owe to my country, and to you, Gentlemen, in whose service I have held an important situation, and enjoyed material trusts and confidence during several years.

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Whatever the result may be of the facts, and of the particulars of my conduct when so ascertained, I must, and am willing, to stand or fall by it in the estimation of the Public, and of every candid impartial mind. I shall not now permit myself to anticipate that result, any further than to declare, that, instead of being in any respect culpable, I am so confident of being able to prove incontestibly, that it has fallen to my share to have a real and solid fund of merit with the East India Company, and with this Country in general, that if I fail in making out that proposition, I shall admit it to be reasonable, that superior credit should be given to my enemies in every possible matter of contest between them and me; and shall also admit, that insinuations, surmises, or presumptions, on their part, ought to outweigh the most powerful proofs on mine.

That justice may be done to me, and satisfaction afforded to you, Gentlemen, and for the purpose also of satisfying my Sovereign and the Public, with respect to my conduct, as an Officer intrusted both by his Majesty and by the East India Company, you must be sensible, Gentlemen, it is indispensably necessary, that I should have communication of the accounts sent home to you from India, specifying the grounds on which the President and Select Committee at Madras thought themselves authorised to dismiss me, not only from the Command in Chief of the Company's troops upon the coast of Coromandel, and from my seat in the Select Committee, but also from the Command in Chief of his Majesty's troops, which I held and enjoyed in consequence of my rank in the King's service, and of my commissions from his Majesty, and of the usage and custom of the army.

2dly, Upon what grounds they thought themselves authorised, on the 17th of September last, 1783, to deprive me of my personal liberty, by ordering an armed force to seize me at my country-house on Choultry Plain, from whence they carried me prisoner to the Fort at Madras, where, without any cause assigned, I was detained a prisoner under  
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rigid confinement; denied the use of pen, ink, and paper; and refused the assistance or communication of lawyers or friends (except on very special occasions, and even then in the presence of the officer on duty, and under whose guard I was daily kept); and in that condition I remained till the 14th day of October last.

3dly, Upon what grounds they thought themselves authorised to proceed to the sending me forcibly on board a vessel which they had prepared on purpose for conveying me to England; and in which vessel accordingly, without my consent, and in opposition to the protests taken by me, both against the President and Select Committee, who issued the orders, and against the Captain of the vessel, who obeyed them, they took care that I should be brought home to England in the state of a prisoner.

This step, of compelling me suddenly to leave India, and to return to Europe, was aggravated by several circumstances.—The vessel on board which I was by military force compelled to embark, was a country vessel, under the name of a packet, suddenly purchased for the occasion, unfit for a Europe voyage, both from the state of the vessel, and from the unskilfulness of the Master and crew. This, on the best information received at Madras, was asserted by me, and communicated to the Select Committee there, before they gave their orders for my embarking; and though, by singular good fortune, and after many narrow escapes, the vessel has at last actually arrived in a British port, yet my assertion, and the information on which it was founded, have been justified, by my sad experience of most uncommon hardships, during a voyage of more than six months, and of personal danger to the latest period of that voyage.

This violence was used, notwithstanding my repeated requests to the Select Committee at Madras, to desist from their purpose of sending me to Europe, especially in such a vessel; and notwithstanding an offer



made on my part, and which was officially entered on record, by which I became bound to give every security that could be desired for the preservation of the public peace, if allowed to remain in the settlement. Another alternative proposed by me was, to remove myself to Bombay in one of his Majesty's ships then ready to sail, or to be set down at Tranquebar, or any neutral place, there to remain retired until the very Government of Madras should call me from thence.

I thought it impossible that all these offers could have been refused, knowing, as I did, that in the case of the meanest British subject, and even in the case of delinquency or misdemeanour, ascertained by legal process in any of the Presidencies, the person who had thus rendered himself justly obnoxious to Government, was, however, by law intitled to a reasonable time to settle his private affairs, before he could be forced out of the Country and sent to Europe; giving, in the mean time, proper security for his good behaviour.

In my case, however, where no delinquency had been ascertained, no legal process commenced, nor even any charge intimated to me, every request or remonstrance on my part, that did not coincide with the views of the Select Committee at Madras, was either treated with neglect, or produced a positive refusal.

Such outrages against any individual who had ever set foot in India, even in the meanest situation in the Company's service, are, it is believed, almost, if not entirely, without example:—They become the more flagrant when employed against one who, in the character of Major General in the King's service, and Brigadier General in that of the Company, had the honour to command both his Majesty's army and the forces of the East India Company in that part of the world; and to whom, from various personal considerations, that state of confinement at Madras, and the subsequent voyage to Europe, on board such a vessel as that which was allotted to me, were more mortifying  
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and distressing than they could have been to almost any other person; for having had the misfortune to lose a limb, while employed in the field in your service, the confinement during several weeks before leaving Madras, and the state of inactivity to which I was reduced in a small cabin on board a very inconvenient vessel (being unable to walk the deck with the use only of one leg), these things exposed me to particular hardships, and threatened the worst of consequences to my health.

But what peculiarly increases the enormity of these proceedings, and to which I wish more particularly to draw your attention, is, that all this was done without ever communicating to me, or to any friend of mine, the grounds or pretences on which these severities and violences were founded.

Neither the persons who violently seized me at my country-house on Choultry Plain, nor those who detained me prisoner in the Fort at Madras, nor those who carried me from thence by force on board the vessel, nor the Captain of the vessel, who it seems undertook to land me in England, ever communicated to me the instructions under which they acted, though that communication was positively required by me from them:—And when I applied to the Government at Madras for their charges against me, and for the grounds and pretences under which they acted, in depriving me of my personal liberty, I never was able to obtain any manner of satisfaction on these points:—One general answer which I received from them, when I applied for the communication of papers, which on various pretences they did not chuse to gratify me with, was, That on my arrival in England I should be able to procure whatever might be proper to demand from the India House.

I am under the necessity, therefore, of applying to you, Gentlemen, for a communication of that which so intimately concerns myself, and which I think I had a right to have known long before now; for if I  
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am not mistaken with regard to the nature of the British Constitution; I believe there can be nothing more foreign to the genius of that Constitution, nor more adverse to the mode in which the East India Company have exercised the powers and privileges enjoyed by them under it, than that any British subject, and more especially a British subject who went to India with the approbation of his Majesty in a high situation in the Company's service, and who had arrived at the highest military situation both in the King and Company's service in that part of India, should be deprived of his personal liberty, detained a close prisoner, and sent home like a felon, without ever being made acquainted with the charges against him, or with the grounds or pretences on which these acts of violence were committed.

All that I know is, that I have suffered severely, and considering the situation I held, as well as my services, have been most ignominiously and indecently treated; but on what account all these outrages have been committed, I do most solemnly declare that I am totally ignorant.

If it is permitted to those who act abroad under a delegated authority from the East India Company, to exercise such acts of violence and oppression as they think proper, without ever specifying to the party aggrieved the reasons on which they proceed; the effects of such uncontrolled exercise of power, must indeed be alarming.—It not only operates to the immediate risque and loss of property, but the tendency of it must be, to make it impossible for the most oppressed, and at the same time the most innocent or meritorious, ever to obtain redress for injuries sustained, or ever to be able to do justice to their characters and conduct, by refuting charges or aspersions, which the authors of the violence have industriously concealed.

But as it is impossible to suppose, that the East India Company will ever lend their aid to a concealment of this nature, so contrary to the most obvious principles of equity, and to the liberties enjoyed by  
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British subjects, I apply to you, Gentlemen, with the greatest confidence, that you will be pleased to order full and unreserved communication to be given to me, of every charge, surmise, conjecture, or suspicion, on which these violent proceedings have been founded, or endeavoured to be justified; whether the reasons given, or the justifications attempted, have been sent over to you in Letters, Reports, or Minutes from the President and Council of Madras, or from the Select Committee there; or in Letters from the President, or from the Members of the Select Committee separately.

Such communication must be serviceable to the interests of truth and of justice; and can only be hurtful to the party which has acted in defiance of both. If I am not able to refute the charges and suspicions when known, I must then be the sufferer, and I shall then be left without my present excuse, founded on the impossibility of refuting charges that are entirely unknown.

If, on the other hand, the knowledge of what is laid to my charge shall enable me, as I am confident it will, to give you the completest satisfaction, that the cruel and extraordinary proceedings against me have taken rise from deception or error, without resorting to any other causes that might deserve harsher epithets, I am persuaded, Gentlemen, that you will rejoice with me in affording an opportunity of having those errors and deceptions removed, and by that means enabling me to give you complete conviction, that I had done my duty to the Honourable East India Company, and had in no shape been unworthy of the trust which you had been pleased to repose in me.

Permit me, Gentlemen, further to request, that you will give orders for my being supplied with copies of any minutes, resolutions, or proposed paragraphs of official letters to India which you have been pleased to form respecting me personally, since the beginning of February last; and particularly, to be supplied with copies of any minutes, resolutions, or official paragraphs of letters which have been actually

tually sent to India since that time to the present period, respecting me or my situation.

You must be sensible, Gentlemen, that it is extremely mortifying and distressing to me, to hear in general, that prejudices have been entertained against me, on account of the disputes in which I was involved with the President and Select Committee at Madras, whilst it is not so generally known that these disputes did not originate with me.—The same or similar disputes had existed between the Select Committee at Madras, and the preceding Commander in Chief, that excellent deserving officer Sir Eyre Coote.—During the whole time of his spirited exertions in the Carnatic, he was involved in constant disputes and altercations with that Committee.—These disputes still prevailing at the time of his death, I became unfortunately, though unavoidably, engaged in them, from thinking it my duty to conform to Sir Eyre Coote's orders and instructions while alive; and to follow out the spirit and intention of them even after his death.

I cannot help flattering myself, that if the various disputes which existed between Sir Eyre Coote and the Select Committee at Madras, had, according to the order of time, been first brought under consideration for your decision, the tendency of that order of enquiry, and the result of your deliberations upon these disputes, would have served to procure a greater degree of favour and indulgence for those in which I was unavoidably engaged, either as acting under Sir Eyre Coote, or as succeeding to him in the command.

However, as I have learnt that the disputes between the Select Committee at Madras and me were taken up for your decision, antecedently to those between Sir Eyre Coote and them; and that the facts stated, and the arguments employed, by the Select Committee, have been adopted by the Court of Directors, in preference to those used on my part, and had even so much weight as to produce an Order, in the month of February last, for my dismissal from the service; I hope,  
Gentlemen,

Gentlemen, it will appear to you reasonable, that, in a matter which so nearly concerns me in every respect, I should have communication of the minutes or resolutions on that subject, and of the paragraphs of the General Letters which have been sent to India respecting me.—It is needless to observe, that it is not from idle curiosity, or with a desire to find fault, or merely with a view to criminate others, but with a view to the justification of myself, and of my conduct, that I now apply for this necessary communication.

There is only one other request which I beg leave to be allowed to make on this occasion; it is, That if no Letters or Paragraphs have hitherto been sent out to India, containing an approbation of the violent outrages which have been committed by the President and Select Committee at Madras against me, that the same equitable line of conduct, in abstaining from any thing that might import an approbation of these outrages, may be continued, until I have an opportunity of submitting to your consideration, a true and exact state of facts, with the proofs in support of them, in answer to any charges or insinuations that may have been thrown out by the Select Committee at Madras to my prejudice, and in justification of their own violence.

I have the honour to be at all times,

GENTLEMEN,

ARLINGTON-STREET,  
Thursday, May 27, 1784.

Your most faithful and

obedient humble servant,

(Signed) JAMES STUART.



